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*Drawing by SPC Michael Stone
of A/4-31*

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Polar Bear Tracks



4TH BATTALION, 31ST INFANTRY REGIMENT NEWS

FORT DRUM NEW YORK

POLAR BEARS HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

By PFC Gabriel Vieira; HHC 4-31 IN

From training future leaders, to training themselves, the Polar Bears are constantly on the go. The Polar Bears returned from West Point and immediately began preparing for a rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, LA.

During the first part of JRTC, platoons and companies conducted training in order to defeat the insurgency of the War on Terror specific to the impending deployment to Afghanistan. During this phase, all Polar Bears, whether new to the Army or seasoned veterans, benefited from training together. The techniques they developed in the first phase, were put to the test during the force-on-force phase.

The force-on-force phase was designed to mimic a full year deployment to Afghanistan. The training was made as real as possible, while keeping safety a top priority. Soldiers wear sensors which, when activated, simulate injuries. Once the sensor is activated, the Soldier opens his "casualty card" which describes his specific injury for the medics to treat. Even the vehicles that the Soldiers use on the missions were equipped with sensors and "battle damage cards."



B/ 4-31 Commander CPT Matthew Dawson, during a Key Leader Engagement (KLE) (photo by 2LT Jack Mooney)



HHC/ 4-31 Commander, CPT Tomasello, performs his duties as the 4-31 Battle Captain.

The Tactical Operations Center (TOC), was the hub of all activities. The TOC monitors, tracks, and directs the units in conducting the operations. This too, was made as real as possible by using all the standard equipment that would be used in Afghanistan.

All Polar Bears, no matter rank or experience, benefited from the training conducted at JRTC.



C/ 4-31 engages in a small arms fire fight with insurgents during a JRTC mission (photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira)

Expert Infantrymen



By PFC Gabriel Vieira

In September, Polar Bears with 11 series MOS, ranging in rank from private to captain, competed for one of the most coveted badges of the Infantry Branch, the Expert Infantryman Badge (EIB).

After successfully completing the required prerequisites, which included a timed 12 mile road march, qualifying expert with the M16/M4, day and night land navigation, and a physical fitness test, Soldiers began EIB lane testing. The lanes, which last about a week, consist of testing the Infantryman's basic skills. The tasks that they need to complete in order to win the badge are timed tasks that must be done in a strict order.

After talking with Soldiers such as SPC Ben Drzemala, who said, "I think that the Soldiers that successfully earned the EIB should definitely feel a sense of pride from their accomplishment." It is easy to see the esteem radiate from the Soldiers who earn this badge. Soldiers that successfully made it through this long and grueling week of testing have every reason to be proud of their accomplishment."

HHCI 4-31 PFC Tyler Norris, SPC Ben Drzemala, PV2 Valentine, and PVT Ryan Rochford training on the 50 cal. Machine Gun lane at the EIB site.
(photo by SPC Chris Morvant)



C / 4-31 PFC Devinni breaking down the M240 B at the EIB lanes. (photo by SPC Chris Morvant)



Fire Support Team Certification

By PFC Gabriel Vieira

In the preparation of the Polar Bears' deployment to JRTC, the Fire Support Teams (FIST) participated in a Brigade-wide fire support certification test (FISTCERT). The FISTCERT establishes a means to validate the Battalion's ability to safely and accurately call for artillery, mortar, attack helicopters, and close air support in order to support troops in contact with the enemy.



C / 4-31 Fire Supporters review the tasks, conditions and standards before beginning the land navigation portion of the FIST certification. (photo by SPC Chris Morvant)

The certification consisted of many different events: day and night land navigation, Observation Point (OP) occupation, a graded call for fire mission, a written test, a hands on exercise with their fire support equipment, and crater analysis.

When speaking to Polar Bear Fire Support Specialists that participated in this certification, they all agreed the toughest part of the assessment was the written test, which ironically, was made by the Polar Bears' very own FSNCO, SFC Nicolas Bowles. "This was one of the most challenging certifications I have been a part of" said SSG Dominic Castro. Though the test results are not yet in, the previous FIST certification the Polar Bear FIST teams participated in, they were top in the Brigade, which I am sure they have once again accomplished.



PFC Brown, SSG Dauretry, and 2LT Mooney B/4-31 use the hands on equipment with the Lightweight laser designator range finder (LLDR) (photo by SPC Chris Morvant)



CHARLIE COMPANY CHANGE OF COMMAND

By PFC Gabriel Vieira

Upon returning from West Point, we said goodbye to a stellar leader and welcomed new leadership in to the Battalion.

CPT Nick Ziemba graduated from the United States Military Academy in May of 2004 with a Bachelor of Science in Philosophy. His first duty assignment was a weapons platoon leader in Delta Company, 4-31IN where he helped forge the newly formed company. During 2BCT's recent deployment in support of OIF 06-08, CPT Ziemba was attached to 2-15 FA, where he was a platoon leader, as well as intelligence and maneuver adviser to the 2nd Battalion, 4th Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division. Immediately following the BCT's return from OIF 06-08, CPT Ziemba took command of Charlie Company and is on his way to the Maneuver Captain's Career Course at Ft. Benning, GA.



CPT Ziemba passes the Company Guidon to LTC Greene, relinquishing his command of CI 4-31. (Photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira)

Taking on the responsibilities of Commander of Charlie Company is CPT Peter J. Calvello, who is also a graduate of the United States Military Academy. After completing the Infantry Officer's Basic Course at Ft Benning, GA, he served as a rifle platoon leader with B Co, 1-66 AR from November 2005 to June 2007 where he deployed to Camp Taji, Iraq. After graduating from the Maneuver Captain's Career Course, CPT Calvello arrived at Ft Drum, NY where he served a short time with HHC 4-31 IN as an Assistant Operations Officer before taking Command of Charlie Company.

Delta Company Assumption of Command



CPT Likins stands in front of the colors during his Assumption of Command (Photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira)

CPT Likins had already arrived and was performing duties as rear detachment commander, however, prior to block leave we were able to formally welcome him to the Battalion.

CPT Robert Likins enlisted active duty on 10 May, 1990. As a Soldier and noncommissioned officer, he served in the 1st Ranger Battalion where he deployed to OPERATION DESERT STORM and OPERATION RESTORE DEMOCRACY. He then moved to 3-325 Airborne where he deployed to OPERATION JOINT ENDEAVOR. He also served with the 5th Special Forces Group. After over 11 years of enlisted service he was commissioned through OCS on 11 October, 2001.

After attending the Infantry Officers Basic Course, CPT Likins was assigned to Battle Company, 2-503rd Airborne in Vicenza, Italy in May of 2002. While there, he served as a platoon leader and then company executive officer for the 173rd Airborne's deployment and parachute assault into OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM.

CPT Likins returned from Iraq in July of 2003 and was assigned to U.S. Army Student Detachment in order to complete his undergraduate degree with the University of Maryland, University College.

In December of 2004 CPT Likins was reassigned to 2-503rd Airborne and in March of 2005 deployed to OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM as the Battalion Information Operations Officer.

After being selected to participate in Advanced Civil Schooling, CPT Likins was assigned to the U.S. Army Student Detachment again in July of 2006. Upon completing civil schooling, he attended the Maneuver Captain Career Course at Fort Benning, GA. CPT Likins arrived to Fort Drum and the Polar Bears in July of 2008.





POLAR BEAR REENLISTMENTS

By PFC Gabriel Vieira



SPC Patrick Harmon of B/ 4-31 reenlisting at the Polar Bear Formal by 2LT Michael Veglucci
(Photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira)



PFC Tyler Johnson B/ 4-31, also being reenlisted by 2LT Michael Veglucci at the Polar Bear Prom.
(Photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira)



SGT Stefan being reenlisted by his company commander CPT Robert Likins of D/4-31 (Photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira)



In a time of war it is very inspiring to see Soldiers reenlist and show their patriotism as they continue to make the Army not only a life-style, but a career.

In the past few months we have seen Polar Bears of all specialties from PFC to SFC take this next step in their military careers. Some choose to stay and continue their careers as Polar Bears while others move on to other duty stations.

When speaking with some of these Soldiers, such as PFC Damon Lopez of HHC Supply, who will be moving to Ft Hood, Texas, said, "Its going to be a big change leaving the Polar Bears, especially because I have so many friends here. But it is the best move for me and my family getting to be a lot closer to my home town."

Some Polar Bears may move on to their next duty stations, but will continue to do amazing things, as is expected of any Polar Bear. Even though they leave the battalion, they will always remain Polar Bears.



Above CPL Tyler J. Bettin C/4-31 is reenlisted by 2nd LT Ryan of 2nd platoon. CPL Bettin will be moving on to FT Jackson SC with his reenlistment of 5 years. (Photo by SSG James Johnson)



Above, SGT Thomas L. Winkler C/4-31, opted to remain a Polar Bear with his 3 year enlistment. Seen here with the XO 1LT Bunny (Photo by SSG James Johnson)

Right, PFC Joshua Underhill A/4-31 reenlisted to remain a Polar Bear, with his 2 year regular Army reenlistment.
(phot by SSG James Johnson)

Newly promoted 1LT Daniel Medford of B co reenlisting SPC Christopher Wills while the Polar Bears were deployed to JRTC (Photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira)



CPT Joseph Tomasello, Commander of HHC/ 4-31, reenlisting PFC Damon Lopez
(photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira)



CPT Kevin Hock HHC/ 4-31, reenlisting SPC Hugo Bravo HHC/ 4-31
(Photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira)



Above, SGT John W. Herbst, reenlisted by LT Burgess for 3 years to remain at Fort Drum, NY. (Photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira)



The Blackhawks Prepare for the Holidays

By 1LT Jack Mooney

Bravo Company returned from Ft. Polk at the end of October just in time for Halloween, which provided a good opportunity for the soldiers to partake in the festivities and relax after all of their hard work while at JRTC. One costume that stands out within the company is that of LT Veglucci's basset hound, Molly. In honor of the Battalion, she dressed as a Polar Bear and entered in local pet costume contest. She won first prize for most creative costume at The Barker's Dozen where she took home a gift certificate.

Bravo company recently competed in a companywide "American Ball" game (ultimate football) since returning from JRTC. The company was bracketed into four teams: 1st PLT, 2nd PLT, 3rd PLT, and HQ. HQ was the returning champions from a previous contest and would try to defend their title. The first round games would be; 1st vs HQ and 2nd vs 3rd, the winners would then play each other for the championship. HQ jumped out to an impressive lead against 1st and looked to be an easy win. However, 1st never gave up and rallied to overcome a massive deficit winning the game. 1st then played 2nd for the championship and won becoming the new B Company "American Ball" champs.



It has not been all fun and games for Bravo Company since they returned from JRTC; they have conducted recovery operations, multiple road marches, battle focused PT, and CFF training in preparation for upcoming training events. The Blackhawks continue to work hard and strive for excellence in all the things they do.

1st Platoon is now the new B Company "American Ball" champs.



Molly Lieutenant Veglucci's basset hound and best friend prepares for the holidays.

Charlie Rock keeps Rolling

By 1LT Matthew Boise

During the month of September, shortly after returning from West Point, C Company Soldiers were busy honing their skills during the Expert Infantryman's Badge (EIB) training event. The EIB training event is a time honored tradition among infantrymen that requires soldiers to pass a series of rigorous tests in order to earn the coveted EIB. C/ 4-31 soldiers diligently spent the first part of September learning each meticulous task until their test day on the 29th. The outstanding soldiers of C/ 4-31 demonstrated their expertise and ability to learn at EIB resulting in 17 soldiers becoming the Army's newest Expert Infantry Men. The skills learned at EIB will lay a firm foundation for C/ 4-31 future leaders and set the tone for victory in the fight ahead.

Charlie Company deployed to the Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, LA in October. While there Charlie participated in a variety of physically and mentally challenging events. Two platoons participated in convoy live fire lanes. The entire company completed the Mounted IED Recognition Lane. Select individuals completed Street Level Engagement training. One week was spent conducting demanding scenario-based platoon and company level situational training exercises (STX lanes). Throughout the exercise Charlie Company was challenged during several combat and humanitarian based missions, while also tasked as the Brigade Quick Reaction Force (QRF). Charlie continues to train and use the lessons learned at JRTC to prepare for future deployments



On 14 November, members of 1st Platoon were tasked to set up the Polar Bears' segment of the "Commando Avalanche" competition - a 20ft Rope Climb while answering historical questions taken from the Polar Bear history. Rock 6 was the sole participant in the competition for Charlie Company, and he represented the company and battalion well as he steadfastly climbed to glory and answered all of his questions correctly. The NCO's and Soldiers responsible for the site received high accolades for the excellent, professional conduct of the site - another job well done for the Rock.



CPT Pete Calvello Commander C/4-31 reaches the top to the rope climb at "commando Avalanche" (photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira).



The Polar Bear Formal

By PFC Gabriel Vieira

With JRTC just around the corner, the 4-31 IN Soldiers and their dates, joined together for a night filled with excellent food, drinks, and the company of fellow Polar Bears. The Polar Bear Formal was a night to remember.

The formal began with a meet-and-greet social hour and a formal receiving line into the dining area. Once everyone had found their seats, the formal ceremony began, which included: the posting of the US and 4-31IN colors, invocation, ceremonial toasts, dinner being served, a brief intermission, guest speaker, and the retiring of the colors.

One of the highlights of the night was the guest speaker, Mrs. Barbara Oates, wife of the 10th Mountain Commander, Major General Oates. She spoke about the life of the "Army Wife," and her personal experiences. Following her speech, Mrs. Oates was presented with a silver bowl, which was made to represent the Shanghai Bowl, from LTC Richard G. Greene Jr., on behalf of the Polar Bears.

When the formal ceremony was complete, the fun began as music filled the banquet hall and the dance floor filled with Soldiers and their dates. Soldiers of all ranks danced and mingled the night away. When all was said and done, it was definitely a night that will truly be remembered.



Jack Considine, a Regimental Association Member, listens to Mrs. Oates at the Polar Bear Formal (photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira)



4-31 IN Chaplain, CPT Min (photo by PFC Gabriel Vieira)

The Chaplains Corner

"Two men looked through prison bars: one saw mud, the other saw stars."

Go ahead. Read it one more time.

What do you see through the bars of your life?

Do you see loneliness and helplessness as your husband is deployed or do you see opportunities for you to develop yourself and take charge of the things while he is deployed?

In the case of the two prisoners, the situation was not different. However, one decided to look up and see the stars and be hopeful and maybe learn something new at the same time (anyone interested in star constellation?), while the other decided to look down and wallow in one's sorrow by reminding himself of the muddy place that he was in. What made these two people so different? I believe it is their attitude.

Have you thought about your attitude lately? Is your attitude positive and upbeat in outlook or is your attitude negative and expecting all the worst in the world to come your way?

One thing for sure is that if you expect bad things to happen, bad things will come. On the other hand, if you expect good things to come, even when what others label as bad things come your way, you will find a way to make that into a positive learning opportunity as some say, "if life throws you a lemon, make lemonade." You can do it.

Let me end with this short story.

A little boy strutted through the backyard, baseball cap in place, toting ball and bat. He said to himself, "I'm the greatest hitter in the world!" Then he tossed the ball into the air, swung at it and missed. "Strike one!" Undaunted he picked up the ball, threw it into the air and said to himself, "I'm the greatest baseball hitter ever," and he swung at the ball again. And again he missed. "Strike two!" He paused a moment to examine his bat and ball carefully. Then a third time he threw the ball into the air. "I'm the greatest hitter who ever lived," he said. He swung the bat hard again, missed a third time. He cried out, "Wow! Strike three! What a pitcher! I'm the greatest pitcher in the world."

My prayer for all of you is that God would help us all to develop the skill of finding the good in every situation and in every person we meet.

Pro Patria et Deo (for the country and God)

